



Inclusion Through Diversity

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THREE PAGES

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Highlights of the **May 5, 2015** meeting of the Tompkins County Legislature

Legislature Adopts 2016 Financial Goal

As the first step in the process of developing the 2016 Tompkins County budget, the Legislature has approved a 2016 financial goal that directs the County Administrator Joe Mareane to prepare a recommended operating and capital budget that can be supported with a tax levy increase of 1.3%. The 1.3% levy increase, which equals approximately \$600,000 over the 2015 property tax levy, would meet the currently estimated State-imposed property tax cap for Tompkins County, 1.3%.

The tax levy guideline, requested by Administrator Mareane as a basis for working with departments and preparing his 2016 recommended budget, is characterized as the basis for a “maintenance of effort” budget for County departments, while addressing other critical needs and priorities. Budget committee chair Jim Dennis noted that this approach, as advanced by the Administrator, will enable county government to “get stronger, not bigger” within the capacity of the tax cap. Departments and agencies will still have the opportunity to submit over target requests for funding in excess of their 2016 spending targets. It is estimated that, based on current data, the 1.3% levy increase would increase the cost for a median-valued \$165,000 county home by approximately \$15.00. Mr. Dennis said a decrease in the cost of some of the County’s mandated programs, a decline in mandated State pension costs, solid sales tax collections, and results from decisions made in past years have all contributed to the budget outlook for 2016,

Although the 1.3% levy goal was approved by unanimous vote (Legislator Carol Chock was excused), both Legislators Dooley Kiefer and Will Burbank first had voted no, then decided to change their votes. Legislator Burbank said he has been a bit uneasy about the guideline since he does not support the County’s restraining its budget considerations via the tax cap. Legislator Kiefer also expressed reservations, but both ultimately voted in support in deference to Administrator Mareane’s recommendation.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

New Local Law Establishes Sustainable Energy Loan Program

Following a public hearing, the Legislature, by a 12-1 vote, approved a new Local Law to establish a sustainable energy loan program in Tompkins County. The program will provide property assessed clean energy (PACE) financing for local energy-related improvement projects by implementing the *Energize NY* Benefit Financing Program, as authorized under State law. The Legislature also, without dissent, authorized the County Administrator to enter into a municipal agreement on behalf of the County with the Energy Improvement Corporation to implement and administer the program. (Legislator Carol Chock was excused.)

The PACE program offers low-cost long-term financing for energy efficiency and renewable energy projects, supporting up to the entire project cost, for existing properties owned by a commercial or not-for-profit entity, with repayments collected by the municipality through a charge on the tax bill. While commercially owned multi-family residential properties are among the types covered, non-commercial residential properties are not, due to federal objections to PACE financing for properties with potential to qualify for federally subsidized mortgage loans.

At the public hearing in advance of the vote, Joe DelSindaco, of *Energize NY Finance*, responded to some questions that have been advanced, saying that *Energize NY*, through its extensive outreach and training program has been effective in getting local labor involved in the sustainable energy projects. He said that, while the municipal agreement with the Energy Improvement Corporation to operate the program cannot be changed, conditions can be added—such as for limits on the types of qualified properties or the maximum amount of outstanding loans. He said he would not advise conditions restricting energy-efficiency projects employing natural gas, as had been suggested in discussion at the Legislature’s last meeting. In the vote adopting the Local Law, Legislator Dooley Kiefer voted no, based on that issue.

Economic Development Committee Chair Martha Robertson expressed excitement about the program, which has made PACE financing feasible for local government. County Administrator Joe Mareane called the *EnergizeNY* program “really important,” and thanked the Legislators for their time and effort in considering it. He also acknowledged Planning Commissioner Ed Marx and Deputy Commissioner Katie Borgella for their work in bringing the program forward, and praised the *EnergizeNY* group for its integrity and responsiveness. *Contact: Martha Robertson, Chair, Economic Development Committee, 272-0584.*

Mental Health Building Renovation Project Approved

The Legislature, by unanimous vote amended the County’s Capital Program to incorporate a \$575,000 renovation to the first-floor lobby area of the County’s Mental Health Building and approved a contract with HOLT Architects for architectural, engineering, and construction services for the project not to exceed \$98,000. The renovation will create a centralized reception suite in place of the currently unattended entrance, improving customer service and security, and addressing several building environment concerns. Bonding for the project also was approved in a separate bond resolution.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058.

Bonding for 2015 Capital Projects Approved

The Legislature approved nine separate bond resolutions, authorizing up to a little over \$7 million in bonding, to finance a range of projects, all authorized as part of the County’s Capital Plan. Among projects included in the bond authorization are up to \$800,000 in capital improvement projects at various County facilities; the Mental Health Building renovation; up to \$1 million for road and highway reconstruction and improvements, and up to \$200,000 for repair or replacement of existing bridges; just over \$1.8 million to address capital maintenance needs at the 20-year-old Recycling and Solid Waste Center, and \$367,000 for improvements related to leachate management at the County’s Caswell Road landfill. The bond authorizations prepare for a bond sale this summer.

Contact: James Dennis, Chair, Budget, Capital and Personnel Committee, 387-4058; County Administrator Joe Mareane, 274-5551.

Legislature Fails to Approve Law Governing Sparkling Devices

The Legislature, by a split vote of 6-7 (Legislator Carol Chock was excused) turned down a proposed new Local Law that would have allowed the sale of sparkling devices in restricted periods during the year. The Legislature through its action did not approve a local option to allow the devices to be excluded from the “Dangerous Fireworks” definition under New York State Penal Law. Voting against the proposed law were Legislators Glenn Morey, Martha Robertson, Nate Shinagawa, Mike Sigler, Peter Stein, Will Burbank, and Dan Klein.

Emergency services officials, including Ithaca Fire Chief Tom Parsons and County Director of Emergency Response Lee Shurtleff, have expressed their concern about the safety of the devices, both from their use and to responders related to their storage. Chief Parsons tonight again addressed the Legislature, urging opposition to the measure. Prior to the vote, Legislators Stein, Robertson, and Burbank all spoke out against, referencing the potential safety concerns. Legislator Jim Dennis pointed out that he found sparklers already available locally, and Chair Mike Lane, who voted in favor, said he is particularly concerned about confusion created by the county-by-county approach required by the State.

Contact: Dan Klein, Chair, Government Operations Committee, 272-7582.

Legislature Pays Tribute to Stuart Stein

The Legislature, without dissent, passed a resolution in honor of former County Board of Representatives Member Stuart Stein, who passed away in June of last year and was remembered at a memorial service May 3. The measure pays tribute to Mr. Stein and his many contributions to the community through public service, including nearly two decades on the Board of Representative (now the County Legislature), including as Chair from 1994-1996. The resolution notes that Mr. Stein served the entire County through recommendations and guidance leading to development of the Strategic Tourism Planning Board, the Municipal Electric and Gas Alliance, Tompkins Consolidated Area Transit, and creation of a Tompkins County Poet Laureate. The resolution acknowledges Stu Stein's "selfless dedication, commitment, and foresight" to the residents of Tompkins County.

Contact: Michael Lane, Chair of the Legislature, 274-5434, 844-8313, or 844-8440; Legislator James Dennis, 387-4058.

Among other business:

The Legislature, without dissent, approved a resolution supporting establishment of a vessel waste no-discharge zone for Cayuga Lake, Seneca Lake, and the Seneca River, and related determination of adequate pumpout facilities. It supports a State petition to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency for a determination that adequate facilities for safe and sanitary removal and treatment of sewage from all vessels are reasonably available so that the State may completely prohibit discharge of sewage from all vessels into those waters. The EPA has determined pumpout facilities adequate, including at least six on Cayuga Lake, and has invited public comment on its proposed determination by May 18.

The Legislature authorized a four-year joint-services agreement whereby the Tompkins County Assessment Department will continue to provide assessment services to the Town of Covert in Seneca County. Tompkins County had begun to provide such services on a one-year trial basis.

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